

realpeople

the gospel in everyday language



Today's Readings:

A grave responsibility. Ezek 33:7-9
Avoid all debt but the debt of love. Rom 13:8-10
Try to win back your brother, your sister. Mt 18:15-20

Next Week: Forgiveness

Sirach 27:30-28:7; Rom 14:7-9;
Mt 18:21-35

In a nutshell

Today's Gospel speaks of the power of united prayer as a force of healing and reconciliation among members of the community. The presence of Jesus abides with us always through the Holy Spirit. By opening ourselves to this mystery, our conflicts, disagreements and misunderstandings can be resolved in fresh and creative ways.



Amazing grace

I am involved in a Christian ministry which reaches out to people in prison. A team of us will spend 3-4 days at a time presenting a program of religious renewal and sharing our faith with a group of inmates.

As part of this ministry we hold a forgiveness ceremony. We start by asking the participants to write down on a piece of paper the names of all the people in their life from whom they need to ask forgiveness. Then we place all the papers in a bin and burn them as a symbol of the Christian belief that through the death and resurrection of Jesus our sins are forgiven and we are reconciled with God.

We took the bin and the group to an outdoor area where we lit a fire. As we went about this ceremony, our surrounds seemed less than ideal. From the barred windows of the surrounding prison blocks a deluge of swearing and cursing poured forth—with us as the targets! Our leader reassured us and told us to ignore the swearing.

But some of us were put off by it, wondering: Is this a good time to be doing this? Shouldn't we go back inside?

As we stood there around the fire, amidst a cacophony of ugly swear words, an extraordinary thing happened. One of the participants in our group began to sing Amazing Grace. With gusto! Linking arms, we all joined in until the area was filled with the voices of sixty or so strong male voices singing Amazing Grace. This was a perfect choice of prayer. You see, most of these men had little or no religious background. So finding a common prayer would have been impossible. But everyone knew Amazing Grace. Or at least the first verse. So we sang - on and on - until every last paper was burnt. When we stopped, there was a deep, deep silence. No cursing from the prison blocks. No noise. Nothing. A complete quiet. (Neil)

God heals

I moved to Australia from Scotland as a child. I have vivid recollections of the fierce sectarianism of my early Presbyterian upbringing. I remember my cousins being beaten up by Catholics. Even in Australia, my family remained suspicious of Catholics.

But God wanted to heal this part of my life, and to my amazement I found this in a Catholic Charismatic prayer group! My involvement with Catholics angered my father who refused to have anything to do with me. Yet even this wound was healed. Before Dad died I was able to be reconciled with him. How I marvel at God's love which can overcome the deepest hurt. (MT)



A healing voice

I was feeling cranky at the start of Mass. Resentment filled my heart as I went through the motions of prayer. Then a girl got up before the congregation and sang a psalm. It was just a few lines, but her voice was so angelic and her sincerity so evident, that by the last note I was a changed person. My heart had melted. The crankiness had gone. I had experienced the healing touch of the body of Christ. (Anna)

Think . Pray . Act

Think of a gathering of people (e.g. a family meal, a parish meeting) where the atmosphere can sometimes get 'stuck' with tension or heaviness.

Pray to the Holy Spirit to help you 'free' this gathering from its bind.

Next time the situation arises, try something 'new'; e.g., a prayer, a song, a moment's silence, a gesture of affection, or some good humour.



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